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G.O.F.

In this age of acronyms and abbreviations, I hereby offer a set of initials that carries no patent, is not described in Wikipedia, is not explained away in Urban Legends and will not be found in any dictionary: G.O.F. for Gift of Faith.

We do not need to think about breathing, but we inhale and exhale, all day and all night. We might not spend much time considering the many ways that we speak and act according to our values and ideals, but we do so quite often. And we might not reflect on faith, though our beliefs have much to do not only with our quality of life, but the value we place on life itself.

Though some people avoid the use of the word faith because they associate it with a particular system of beliefs or a religion, we all have inner thoughts and sayings that we employ for guiding us consciously and also unconsciously when we are making decisions. We acquired some of these beliefs or inner words from our parents or from persons who were particularly influential in our lives. With little effort, most of us can recall some rules we accepted when we were young, such as "always match your pairs of socks," and might be amused to find that we have perhaps internalized some of these sayings into beliefs, not only about pairs of socks, but also about keeping all like things together. We act on beliefs of all kinds, often with very little reflective thought.

Our human capacity to make choices based on freely held principles that we utilize as guides in forming our words, actions, thoughts and prayers, as well as in all our relationships, is as marvelous a gift as is our ability to think or even to act. We are surrounded with all kinds of limitations, both in terms of material physical forces, and also in terms of our own personal knowledge, experience, health and many other realities. But our beliefs and our believing are not limited by forces outside us or by any of our personal characteristics. Beliefs are ours to choose and to exercise, however much they might be similar to, or dissimilar from, others'. The gift of faith is, like all real gifts, ours to accept or reject, to use or not to use, but faith is as much a reality in life as is breathing.

Faith is not a creation of our own, but a gift that paradoxically originates in the faith that our Creator has in us – trusting us to choose appropriate responses to all the internal and external movements that affect us. We know from our experience that no one, including God, forces us to make an act of trust in anyone or in any proposition, to believe or to disbelieve, to have faith or to deny faith. We can become fully appreciative of a very practical reality through reflection: most of what is good in life is directly

related with our beliefs. If we believe, for example, that life is worth living, we go about it with all that we have and are. But if we disregard our beliefs, we suffer the consequences of disorientation, as much as if we refrained from using the steering wheel while driving a car.

One profitable and brief personal exercise: consider the positive effects of the G.O.F.